

Food Matters: Clinical Education and Advocacy Training

June 11, 2011

The relationship between health and nutrition has an obvious link to human development and survival. As we observe the increasing rise in chronic health problems exacerbated by obesity and malnutrition, we know that nutrition is more complex than what is contained in the familiar food pyramid. Access to healthy, sustainable food is critically important throughout the life cycle. Knowledge, awareness, and behavior change among individuals, communities, and health care providers is an important first step in improving health and influencing systemic change.

On June 11, 2011 the Jefferson School of Population Health and the Center for Urban Health hosted *Food Matters: Clinical Education and Advocacy Training*, a ground-breaking program presented by Women's Health and Environmental Network (WHEN). This national training program was designed by Health Care Without Harm in partnership with the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Program on Reproductive Health & the Environment, and San Francisco Physicians for Social Responsibility. It is being piloted in four cities, including Philadelphia. The overall goal of the program is to encourage hospitals and healthcare professionals to become leaders and advocates for a food system that promotes public and environmental health.

The Philadelphia program featured several prominent clinical leaders in the food advocacy and environmental health arena. Jill Stein, MD, Founder of the Massachusetts Coalition for Healthy Communities, opened the day with an extremely informative framework and rationale for the importance of healthy food. She emphasized the multi-layered contributors to disease and environmental degradation.

Joel Forman, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Community and Preventive Medicine at The Mount Sinai School of Medicine, provided a compelling argument regarding a potential relationship between exposure to toxic chemicals in food systems (including perinatal exposures) and neurodevelopmental issues in childhood. He also shared evidence-based research on the problems associated with antibiotic resistance and food-borne illness.

Colette Acker, IBCLC, Director of the Breastfeeding Resource Center in Abington, PA, described the research to support the promotion of breastfeeding as an essential practice to reduce risks of illness. She emphasized the global picture of how breastfeeding benefits society in reducing costs and preventable disease. Kendra Klein, PhD candidate, of the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management

of the University of California, Berkeley provided an overview of policy issues and advocacy initiatives that are designed to affect changes in systems. For example, she discussed the Healthy Food In Health Care Pledge created by Health Care Without Harm to enlist the commitment of hospitals to use fresh, local and sustainable food and food practices.

The training program included a lively panel discussion moderated by Dianne Moore, MS, MSW, Manager of WHEN, and breakout sessions designed to elicit ideas and action steps for advocating for a healthier food system. Attendees were treated to a delicious, sustainable lunch of locally sourced meats and produce provided by the department of Nutrition and Dietetics at Jefferson University Hospital. ■

For more information about the Food Matters training program visit: http://www.noharm.org/us_canada/events/foodmatters/

To learn more about WHEN visit: www.when.org